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## Europe Needs No Part in Doomed Afghan War

by William Pfaff  
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PARIS — When President Barack Obama was in Strasbourg, France, for the NATO "summit" at the beginning of April, he made a plea for more European soldiers for Afghanistan.

He hasn't had much of a reply — 65 men with two F-16s promised by Belgium; 12 trainers and a small troop contingent (probably from the gendarmerie) for the elections in Afghanistan next month, with a larger French contribution to the new, combined European Gendarmerie Force that has already dispatched 300 to 400 men and women, all to improve Afghanistan's own national police, so far without conspicuous success.

This suggests that the Europeans think the Afghan adventure a waste, or of little importance to Europe, if not a danger, but that the Americans have to humored. Certainly, few took it seriously when Obama told his NATO audience that Europe is more menaced than ever by al-Qaeda. Why? He recalled to them their geography: Europe is closer to Afghanistan than is the United States, hence easier for the al-Qaeda terrorists and the waves of bearded Afghan militants to reach.

But why? That is always the question. Why should Afghan Muslim fundamentalists want to attack Europeans? The British feel threatened, but it nearly always turns out that the people arrested for plotting against Britain are disgruntled British citizens of Pakistani descent, born in London or Manchester immigrant housing estates, usually unemployed and embittered.

Last Wednesday, the British counterterrorism authorities set free the last two of 12 Pakistani men who two weeks ago Prime Minister Gordon Brown had said were part of "a very big

terrorist plot," and which the police said would involve mass casualties. The men were seized in an operation involving hundreds of police raiding 10 locations, including a university library. (The men were all in Britain on student visas.) However, there turned out to be something wrong here, since the police failed to find any evidence of a mass attack, and the men were released and put on planes for home.

At least the alleged terrorists who went on trial last week in Dusseldorf are charged with being in possession of 12 drums of hydrogen peroxide and military detonators. (And since they have been imprisoned, all have worn beards, which seems pretty conclusive!). One of them is a Turkish citizen, two are Germans converted to Islam, and the fourth is a German with Turkish parents. Al-Qaeda is not known to have a Turko-German wing.

The Madrid bombings of 2004, which killed nearly 200, were linked to Algerians. The London Underground bombings remain unsolved. The Paris bombings in the 1980s were committed by Algerians in revenge for France's relations with an anti-Islamist Algerian government.

In short, Europe certainly is not immune to terrorist attacks, what with these bombings; the Red Brigades in Germany and Italy; and the assassinations of foreign military attaches in Greece, carried out in revenge for the Western-supported "Colonels' dictatorship" three decades ago. But these all seem to be native growths, none with proven connection to al-Qaeda. They all have to do with European or American official relationships with the Saudi Arabian, Pakistani, Algerian and Greek governments, or with European support for U.S. policies

If Barack Obama had wanted to give the NATO allies prudent advice about how to avoid terrorist attacks, he should have told them to have nothing to do with the American war on terror, even if it is now under Obama management and renamed "overseas contingency operations."

The Europeans don't have a dog in the fight against the Taliban, who never did anything to them (at least since the last Afghan War in the 19th century), and who show strong signs of winning control of Northern Pakistan, Kabul and the strategically important parts of Afghanistan. Bad enough that the United States is humiliated once again in a useless war, like Vietnam and Iraq, contributing to the existing hatred of non-Westerners toward Washington.

Europe should leave bad enough alone in this situation, and hope that President Obama is too intelligent not to work his way out of this war. But most of the bureaucratic forces, and those of institutionalized foreign policy opinion in Washington, seem committed to making overseas contingency operations a permanent feature of American life. The allies are justified in taking a pass.